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SUGGESTIONS FOR CURING AND SMOKING TURKEYS

In studies by the Bureau of Animal Industry of methods for curing and smoking turkeys, progress has been made, but several important problems remain to be solved. Generally speaking, definite recommendations are not justified at this time. Pending the development of more specific information, the following suggestions are offered for the benefit of persons who may wish to undertake the

preparation of smoked turkey on a small scale.

Turkeys to be used for curing and smoking should be subjected to the usual overnight fasting period (with access to water), then bled and brained through the mouth, and carefully picked dry, or the feathers removed by the slack-scald method in water heated to 126° F. Care should be taken not to break the skin in the dressing and handling. Birds with badly torn skin should be rejected. The full scald is undesirable since the skin is more likely to be injured when this method is used. Immediately after being picked, the birds should be drawn and then chilled to an internal temperature of 30° to 40° F. To prepare for curing, remove the head, viscera, neck, and feet, leaving the body cavity open at both the fore and rear ends.

A suitable curing mixture consists of 6 pounds of salt, 3 pounds of sugar, and 3 ounces of saltpeter dissolved in 4-1/2 gallons of water. This pickle contains approximately 13 percent of salt and has a salinometer reading of about 70° at a temperature of 38° F. Experience has shown that about four times this indicated quantity of pickle is required to cover 100 pounds of moderately large dressed turkeys when packed carefully in a 50-gallon barrel.

The dressed turkeys should be packed carefully and close together in a suitable container, such as a crock or a clean, well-soaked, odorless, hardwood barrel, and weighted dwn with a clean board and brick or stone so they will not float when the curing solution is added. Then pour the solution over the turkeys until they are covered with a slight excess of liquid. It is important that the temperature of both the meat and the pickle be approximately 38° F. when the curing process is begun and be kept at that point throughout the curing period. At weekly intervals the turkeys should be removed from the container and repacked in order to remix the pickle and to insure that it will come in contact with all parts of the tirds.

Depending on the weight of the turkeys the meat should be sufficiently cured in from 2 to 4 weeks to be removed from the pickle and prepared for smoking. It is suggested that the individual turkey remain in cure not less than 1-1/3 days per pound of dressed weight; probably 1-1/2 days per pound would be a good standard to follow.

The cured turkey should be washed in warm water, hung up intil dry, and then smoked, using hardwood, at a suggested smokehouse temperature of 100° to 110° F. During the smoking process it is believed the turkey should be hung by the wings in order to provide for maximum exposure of skin as well as an opportunity for further drainage of curing fluid especially from the body cavity. Several hours in hardwood smoke may give sufficient flavor although some persons may prefer to smoke the meat longer, even to the extent of having a fire under it 8 to 10 hours each day for several days. However, in addition to other effects, smoking also causes dehydration, and therefore long-continued smoking may result in the concentration of salt in the meat to a point where it becomes objectionable.